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STATEMENT OF
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FOR CONSERVATION, RESEARCH, AND EDUCATION,
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Before the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs,
U.S. House of Representatives

On H.R. 39, "Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation
Act of 1979"

February 13, 1979

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE:

I am pleased to appear before your Committee today in support of
H.R. 39, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1979.

I appeared before this Committee several times in the 95th Congress
in support of similar legislation and, on February 1 of this year
I briefed the Committee on actions taken by the Secretary and the
President to recognize and protect National Forest lands in Alaska
since the adjournment of the 95th Congress. I believe there is strong
public support for this legislation and, speaking for the Department and
the Administration, we look forward to its early enactment.

As you know, the Forest Service has been involved in two major
planning efforts affecting National Forest lands in Alaska--Tongass
National Forest land management planning and the Roadless Area Review and
Evaluation (RARE II). Both of these efforts have had as their objectives
the provision of a quality Wilderness System and a continuous supply of
goods and services from lands managed for multiple uses other than wilder-
ness. Each effort involved the use of substantial public input and
comprehensive resource information.

I am particularly pleased that the wilderness designations proposed
in H.R. 39 generally coincide with those proposed in RARE II. The RARE II
process is nearing completion. As you know, in transmitting the final

Environmental Impact Statement to affected governors and members of Congress, I indicated that I would be happy to have any further views by February 28. I recently extended the time to March 15, 1979.

Chugach National Forest

H.R. 39 and the RARE II proposal for wilderness designation on the Chugach National Forest are identical. We strongly support designation of the Nellie Juan and College Fiord Wildernesses to provide representation of areas dominated by rugged glacier-sculptured landscapes containing numerous bays, inlets, and valley and hanging glaciers. These two areas are easily accessible to the major metropolitan area of Anchorage and their wild scenic beauty is enjoyed by residents as well as visitors traveling through on the State ferry system. The proposed Devilpaw (Red Peak) and Tonki Cape Wildernesses provide an important wilderness representation on Afognak Island characterized by high alpine ridges dotted by many lakes. Afognak Island contains a primary stand of Sitka spruce which is slowly spreading and invading areas of grass which presently covers large portions of the Island. A successful elk transplant has been made on Afognak and is the only area in Alaska where this majestic animal occurs. We also are pleased that the Two Indian area proposed for addition to the Kenai National Moose Range will be considered by the Department of the Interior for possible inclusion within the Kenai Wilderness.

H.R. 39 also provides for the Chugach National Forest additions which will be included in the Nellie Juan and College Fiord Wilderness. We support the designation of these additions. In addition, H.R. 39 proposes wilderness study status for Prince William Sound.

A study of this area is appropriate because questions relating to potential aquaculture development and to State and Native selections need further evaluation. The Administration also recommends H.R. 39 be amended to provide that the Copper River area continue to be administered by the Forest Service as part of the Chugach National Forest and that wilderness study status be applied to the entire Copper River area. In the management of this area, the Forest Service's will continue to emphasize wildlife values in cooperation with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the University of Alaska. This is consistent with the Administration's objective to promote efficient administration of Federal lands in Alaska by consolidating land management units. We have provided the Committee with copies of the current management plan for the Copper River Delta area. We recommend that the 900,000 acres proposed to be added to the Chugach National Forest also be included in the Copper River Wilderness Study Area.

We expect detailed planning for all resources on the Chugach National Forest to be completed by June 1980 and to include wilderness study of the Prince William Sound and Copper River areas.

I would now like to discuss our recommendations for the Tongass National Forest.

Tongass National Forest

H.R. 39 and the RARE II proposal both provide for wilderness designation of Admiralty Island and Misty Fiords National Monuments. Both of these areas will be outstanding additions to the Wilderness System. We do not propose to change their Forest Service National Monument status except to superimpose

on them the more restrictive wilderness designation. Admiralty Island is noted for its superlative combination of scientific, historic, and scenic objects. It has the highest concentrations of brown bear and eagles in Alaska and also contains all 5 species of pacific salmon. Misty Fiords is an unspoiled coastal ecosystem containing significant scientific, geologic, and ecological characteristics. The area dramatically displays the typical glacier-carved valleys and includes all successional stages from icecap to salt water. We are considering whether to adopt regulations governing the management of National Forest National Monuments, or whether to simply identify existing regulations which apply. Earlier, we provided the Committee with copies of these draft regulations which could be used to provide for the protection of the scientific, historic, and scenic objects and prescribe the type of uses that can occur if existing regulations are deemed inadequate. The Alaska Region of the Forest Service is moving quickly to staff each Monument with a manager to provide needed supervision and management and it is analyzing the need for and extent of necessary support facilities. This will be done within existing budget and staffing levels. Specifically, consideration is being given to construction of a new visitor center at Juneau to serve as a focal point providing interpretive and other visitor services.

More than a year ago, we recommended wilderness designation for the Russell Fiord, West Chichagof-Yakobi, and Stikine-LeConte areas. We continue to recommend wilderness designation for these areas and are included in H.R. 39. These are areas of outstanding scenic grandeur and are key to a coordinated wilderness system in Alaska that includes the finest examples of landforms and ecosystems.

We also recommended five "study" areas and indicated that we were evaluating these and other areas as part of RARE II and the Tongass National Forest land management planning processes. During 1978, we completed resource evaluation on the Forest and in June 1978 issued a Draft Environmental Impact Statement on the Tongass Land Management Plan. We received public comment on the draft plan and have essentially completed a Final Environmental Impact Statement on the Tongass Land Management Plan. The results of this planning were included in the Final Environmental Impact Statement on RARE II filed on January 4, 1979.

The proposed action for the Tongass Land Management Plan is designed to meet the following goals or requirements:

- (1) The inclusion of the wilderness recommendations contained in RARE II,
- (2) the maintenance of current employment levels,
- (3) the protection, use, and enhancement of all natural resources in an environmentally sensitive manner,
- (4) being responsive to public, State of Alaska, and other Federal agencies concerns in the resolution of issues, and
- (5) consideration of cost effectiveness of future investments.

As a result of our planning, we recommend that three of the five areas previously recommended for wilderness study be designated as wilderness--Endicott River, Tebenkof, and Karta. We recommend that Yakutat Forelands and Duncan Canal be managed for uses other than wilderness. We recognize that Yakutat Forelands and Duncan Canal have high scenic, fisheries, and wildlife values. These values will be identified and

protected through special management prescriptions which allow other compatible resource uses. In addition, we recommend that the following areas be designated as wilderness: Boundary Spires, Tracy Arm-Fords Terror, Petersburg Creek, South Baranof, Coronation Islands, Warren Island, Maurelle Islands, the southern portion of Etolin Island, and South Prince of Wales. These areas represent rugged mainland ecosystems containing remnants of the once-massive icecaps, numerous and unique glaciers, and windswept rocky coastlines with many beaches, reefs and spires exposed to the open waters of the north Pacific. All of these areas are included in H.R. 39, and each is an important addition to the Wilderness System. With the addition of these areas, we believe that we have preserved for all generations truly superlative examples of the most beautiful, wild and unique portions of Alaska.

I will provide the Committee with a map and brief description of each area we recommend. Overall, our wilderness proposals agree with those contained in H.R. 39, except that H.R. 39 includes Idaho Inlet and Rocky Pass as additional proposed wildernesses and contains more acreage in the proposed King Salmon Capes, Petersburg Creek, Russell Fiord, and West Chicagof-Yakobi areas. Such enlargements would conflict with other objectives of the land management plan and impede our ability to meet projected outputs. We urge adoption of our proposed areas and boundaries. I would be happy to discuss in more detail any of these areas.

H.R. 39 provides for addition to the Tongass National Forest of the Kates Needle, Juneau Icefield, and Brabazon Range areas. We support action to designate these additions.

A major objective of the Tongass National Forest Plan is to help maintain current employment levels. Historically (1970-76), the forest

industry has harvested an average of 520 million board feet of timber and employed 3,005 people in southeast Alaska. In the last four years (1975-1978) the harvest level has been 450 million board feet. This timber harvest and employment were supported by the total commercial forest land area which, at that time, was essentially all National Forest. This land base has been changed through the State and Native Selections process. Approximately 16 percent of the commercial forest land within the Tongass National Forest, containing some of the best commercial timber, has been or will be transferred to State and Native ownership. It is anticipated that substantial timber harvest will occur on Native lands as well as some harvest on State lands.

The appropriate level of timber harvest from the reduced capability of the Tongass National Forest must be set carefully after consideration of the new landownership pattern and the requirements of the National Forest Management Act concerning overall resource protection and management including wilderness designations.

We plan for an average harvest level of 450 million board feet during the 1980s. To achieve these levels of harvest, additional average annual investments of about \$12 million above current levels will be required. These additional investments will be used for pre-commercial thinning, road construction, and use of advanced logging technology.

We expect to move from our current level of timber sales of 520 million board feet to the new range during the next two to three years and, during the same period, increase investments. Many factors affect actual employment levels, but we believe that the proposed harvest levels on the National Forest and jobs related to roadbuilding and other increased investments, coupled with harvest on State and Native lands and job

opportunities in the fishing and tourism industries, will provide relatively stable employment levels.

I have attempted to highlight key features of the Alaska lands legislation as they relate to the National Forests. We, in conjunction with the Department of the Interior, will be happy to provide the Committee with additional suggestions to clarify or improve the legislation. Also, we will soon provide you with more detailed and technical comments in a formal legislative report on H.R. 39. I and my staff are available to help or consult with you or the Committee staff to expedite consideration of this legislation.

This concludes my prepared comments. I will be happy to respond to questions you may have.

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